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Science and Art Department of the Committee  
of Council on Education.

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NOTICE  
OF  
WORKS OF MEDIÆVAL AND RENAISSANCE  
SCULPTURE,  
DECORATIVE FURNITURE, &c.,

ACQUIRED IN ITALY, IN THE EARLY PART OF THE YEAR 1859,

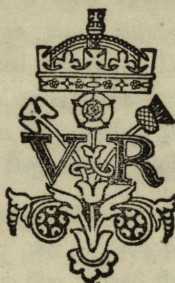
FOR THE

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

BY

J. C. ROBINSON, F.S.A.,

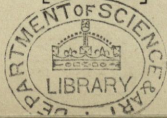
MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS OF FLORENCE, ETC. ETC.,  
SUPERINTENDENT OF THE ART COLLECTIONS OF THE  
SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.



LONDON:  
PRINTED BY GEORGE E. EYRE AND WILLIAM SPOTTISWOODE,  
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY,  
FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

1860.

[Price 2d.]





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of Council on Education.

## NOTICE

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SCULPTURE,

DECORATIVE FURNITURE, &c.

Acquired in Italy, in the latter part of the year 1850.

FOR THE

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

By

J. G. ROBINSON, F.S.A.

Member of the Academy of Fine Arts of Florence and the  
Academy of Fine Arts of Rome, and of the  
Academy of Fine Arts of the Vatican Museums.



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## PREFACE.

THE formation of a national collection of Works of Sculpture of the Middle Ages and period of the revival of Art may be said to have commenced with the purchase of the "Gherardini collection" of original models, by Michael Angelo and other great sculptors, in 1854. This collection, having been in the first instance offered to the British Museum, was purchased by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gladstone, for the sum of 2,110*l.*, out of the vote for "Civil Contingencies," and deposited at Marlborough House. The nucleus thus acquired received some additions even whilst the Museum, remained at Marlborough House, and further and more important ones after the removal to Kensington. In the spring of 1859 it was thought desirable to obtain additional information on an important collection then believed to be on sale in Italy, whilst, at the same time, the general uncertainty and disquietude, induced by the imminent probability of war, seemed likely to facilitate the purchase of works of Art in general. Advantage was accordingly taken of these opportunities, and the works herein described, together with many specimens in other categories, were acquired during a special journey in Italy, made by command of the Committee of Council on Education. Several of the monuments had been previously noted in the preceding year by Mr. Henry Cole, Secretary of the Science and Art Department, whilst travelling for his health.

Some of the objects acquired being of the nature of permanent architectural monuments, it may be objected that their removal from the ancient edifices, of which they formed the most notable ornaments, were unjustifiable acts of spoliation. The reply to this is, that the monuments in question were, in every case, either already removed by the respective authorities in whose charge they had been, or else, being private property, were known to be on sale to the first comer. There could, therefore, be no hesitation in acquiring them for a public museum, seeing that, being in



their nature unsuitable for private collections, they would doubtless ultimately have been either broken up and sold piecemeal, or reintroduced in scattered details into modern *rifacimenti*; and it is evident that next to the preservation of works of Art of a monumental character, unaltered in their original localities, their conservation in similar entirety, in great public museums, accessible to all the world, is the most desirable consummation.

With respect to portable works of small dimensions, or fragments of monuments in the possession of private persons in Italy, no apology for their acquisition and removal from the country need be made; it is desirable, indeed, that every exertion should be used in collecting such works. They are very limited in number and are daily becoming more difficult to procure, whilst, for obvious reasons, very few such specimens are, in future, likely to find their way into private hands.

Moreover, a laudable spirit is beginning to prevail in Italy even, for the conservation *in situ* of national monuments. The long reign of neglect, and the more barbarous mania of demolition, under the plea of renovation, is now rapidly coming to an end, whilst the national and municipal spirit, which has recently received so great a stimulus in that country, will soon make itself felt in the gathering of works of Art especially of a sculpturesque character, into the museums of the several Italian cities.

As an instance in point, the unfortunate pulling to pieces—for such it really amounts to—of the interior of the noble church of Santa Maria Novella, under the plea of restoration, has, since the inauguration of the new government in Florence, excited great indignation, and the alienation of the marble singing gallery, acquired for this museum, has given rise to a state prosecution directed against the conventual authorities, which will probably have the effect of putting an end to the further spoliation of that venerable edifice.

With respect to this monument, the writer is glad to avail himself of this opportunity to justify his own share in the matter of its removal.

On his arrival in Florence shortly before the change of government, which could then scarcely have been foreseen, he was informed that this noble work was lying in fragments on the floor of the Church, amidst a perfect chaos of dilapidation, and that it was on the point of being resold by the person who had purchased it from the monks, with the



purpose of converting it into a balcony for a château in progress of erection near Paris. He forthwith determined to make every effort to secure it for this country, and, after a somewhat difficult negotiation, necessarily undertaken and concluded without a moment's delay, purchased it on his own responsibility. This act was readily confirmed by the then Lord President of the Council (the Marquis of Salisbury). It is obvious, therefore, that in these circumstances, no better fate could have befallen the work in question, than its removal to England, which was promptly effected.

Without, however, in any way countenancing the improper spoliation of ancient edifices, there are still to be had in Italy many important monuments in the category of sculpture. But every day lessens both their number and the chances of their acquisition; and it cannot be too strongly urged that the present moment is the time to add to the collection already commenced.

In conclusion, it should be notified that several of the objects herein described are still left in fragments, and that the others have been erected only in a hasty and temporary manner, there being as yet no space available at South Kensington for their proper exhibition.



## CATALOGUE.

### No. 1.

(No. 5895, Department Register.)

"CANTORIA," or singing gallery of the Conventual Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. The work of the sculptor Baccio d' Agnolo.—Circa 1500. Executed in Carrara marble. Length, 16 ft.; height, 7 ft. 6 in.; projection from the wall, 5 ft.

The wealthy confraternity of Santa Maria Novella having determined to renovate their celebrated church, amongst other injudicious proceedings, decided to do away with the ancient "Cantoria," and to erect another in its stead, designed in the style of the edifice itself, which is of the thirteenth or early part of the fourteenth century. Accordingly, in the beginning of the year 1859, this noble monument was taken down, and sold to Signor Freppa, an eminent dealer of Florence; and immediately afterwards, whilst still lying in disjointed pieces on the pavement of the church, it was repurchased for the Kensington Museum.

This gallery is in reality an elaborate architectural structure. It consists of a square or oblong projecting balcony, formed of marble slabs supported on four massive brackets or cantilever trusses, and crowned by a boldly projecting moulded cornice. It is, in every part, admirably sculptured with Arabesque ornaments, shields, and heraldic devices, amongst which the arms or devices of the Old Florentine Republic, the "Giglio," or fleur-de-lis, and the motto "Libertas" are conspicuous.

*Purchased at the price of 350*l*.*

### No. 2.

"LAVABO" (Fountain or sink) in Macigno stone ("Pietra Serena"), the joint work of Benedetto da Rovezzano and Jacopo Sansovino. From a house in the Via degl' Archibusieri, Florence.—Circa 1490. Extreme height, 13 ft. 6 in.; width across the cornice, 10 ft.

This elaborate monument consists of an architectural frontispiece decorated with pilasters, architraves, friezes, &c., and crowned with a massive cornice surrounding a sunk recess or niche with an arched top, which is filled in with a ribbed or fluted shell. This recess contains an oval vase or cistern for the water elevated on a baluster shaped pedestal. Every portion of the surface is covered with the most elaborate arabesque ornaments executed with incredible labour in a style which it is impossible to surpass.

It is believed to be the work mentioned by Vasari as having been executed by Benedetto da Rovezzano for Bindo Altoviti (see Life of Benedetto), where Vasari further states that the architectural design of both this and a chimney-piece, also executed at the same time, was by Jacopo Sansovini, who was then very young.

It formerly stood in a dark anteroom of the house, where it was only possible to see it by candle-light, and was purchased at the price of 120*l*. (5959.)



## No. 3.

CHIMNEY-PIECE in Florentine "Pietra Serena," the work of the sculptor Donatello.—Circa 1450. Width, 12 ft.; height, 10 ft.; brought from a villa near the church of San Leonardo fuori della Porta at San Miniato in the environs of Florence.

Judging from a careful comparison with the principal authenticated works of Donatello extant in Tuscany, this noble chimney-piece has been, by general accord and without any doubt, ascribed to that great artist.

Two panelled jambs or pilasters, surmounted by massive console brackets, uphold a sculptured frieze and cornice. The brackets are respectively ornamented with small life-size statuettes of Amorini in full relief, the one male, riding on a Syren, the other female, standing on a Dolphin. The panels of the pilaster are filled in with clusters of fruit and foliage, birds, &c., in the manner of the architraves of the celebrated gates of Ghiberti. In the centre of the frieze is a myrtle wreath inclosing a scutcheon of arms upheld by two flying Amorini sculptured in high relief, and on each side of the central group is a life-sized portrait bust, enclosed within a fluted shell. These busts (male and female) doubtless represent the persons for whom the work was executed, and from the armorial bearing are believed to be members of the family Acciaoli. The cornice and various mouldings of the frieze, architrave, &c. are richly ornamented. (5896.)

Purchased at 240l.

## No. 4.

ALTAR-PIECE in Carrara marble by the sculptor Andrea Ferucci of Fiesole. From a private church or chapel of the Ricasoli family at Fiesole, near Florence.—Circa 1490. Width, 9 ft.; height, 12 ft.

An elaborate work in three compartments, with its *predella* or *gradino*, and *lunette* (over the centre portion) complete. A similar work to the altar-piece or reredos at present *in situ* behind the high altar of the Duomo of Fiesole; also by Ferucci. In the centre division, admirably sculptured in full relief, is the Rood or Crucifix, with the Virgin and St. John and two angels, and in the side compartments, in sunk niches, lined with red Florentine marble, are respectively, statues on a larger scale of St. Jerome and St. Anthony, with other half figures of saints in circular medallions above them. The pilasters, architraves, &c., betwixt the divisions, the friezes, archbands, cornices, &c., are all decorated with a profusion of the most admirable arabesque ornaments, sculptured with the utmost perfection of finish. The *predella* forms three compositions of numerous small figures in alto relievo. The centre division contains a representation of the Nativity, with the Adoration of the Shepherds, and the two lateral ones, events from the legends of the respective saints whose statues stand over them. On the summit of the circular pediment in the centre is placed a figure of the infant Saviour, and on each side over the lateral compartments a statuette of an adoring angel.

The entire work is in very perfect preservation and executed in the most choice and beautiful statuary marble.

(6742.)

Purchased with the Tabernacolo, No. 5, for 450l.



## No. 5.

TABERNACOLO, or Ciborium, in connexion with the altar-piece; also the work of Ferucci.—Height, 5 ft. 6 in.; width, 2 ft. 6 in.

A shrine-like frontispiece, with a door in the centre, formerly affording access to a cupboard in the wall. The original gilt bronze door remains, and is engraved with a half figure of our Saviour standing in the sepulchre. Two pilasters, carved with festoons, and clusters of fruits and flowers, flank the sides and uphold a semicircular pediment or lunette, in the centre of which stands a figure of the infant Saviour in full relief, surrounded by beautiful foliated ornaments. The Tabernacolo is supported beneath on a triangular bracket, decorated with an eagle with outspread wings, and a shield of arms, festoons, &c. Of equally delicate and highly-finished work with the altar-piece, with the general style of which it is in strict accordance. (6743.)

## No. 6.

FOUR ANGLE PIERS of a marble pulpit, the work of Nicolo or Giovanni Pisano.—Circa 1290; from a church in the neighbourhood of Pisa. Height of each, 3 ft. 3 in.

These important fragments can be best illustrated by a reference to the well-known marble pulpit of the Baptistery of Pisa. They are evidently portions of a work of similar character, and of apparently equal size. They consist of semi-detached figures in high relief, two of them angels or archangels in rich diapered draperies, the third a saint or doctor of the church, and the fourth piece a group of three figures, also evidently fathers of the church.

The partial revival of the antique classical style, consequent on the study of the antique monuments in the Campo Santo of Pisa, is very obviously manifested in these interesting specimens.  
(5797 to 5800.)

*Purchased at 40*l*.*

## No. 7.

ALTO-RELIEVO in Carrara marble, the Virgin and Child, with angels, by Mino da Fiesole.—Circa 1470. Height, 2 ft. 8 in.; width, 1 ft. 11 in.

The Virgin, a three-quarter figure, seen down to the knee, is seated on a chair or throne, with the infant Saviour standing in her lap. In the upper part in the background are two boy-angels with garlands sculptured in low relief.

This relievo was originally on the altar of the private chapel of the Cardinal Albergotti, and came by succession into the possession of the Marchese Albergotti of Arezzo, from whom it was purchased.  
(6737.)

*Price 80*l*.*

## No. 8.

LIFE SIZED MARBLE STATUE of JASON, attributed to Michel-Angelo, or one of his earlier scholars.—Circa 1530.

Although founded on the antique, this statue is replete with the grandiose style of the great Florentine school, whilst it is at the same time devoid of the overcharged mannerism of Michel-Angelo's later style. In general design and sentiment it displays the immediate influence of the Bacchus of the gallery of the Uffizj and also of the David.

It was obtained from the gardens of the Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, where it formerly stood under the portico "Degl' Orti Oricellai."  
(6735.)

*Price 158*l*.*



## No. 9.

SCULPTURED MARBLE FRIEZE, from a tomb. Attributed to Matteo Civitale.—From the cathedral of Lucca. Length, 3 ft. 6 in.; height, 1 ft. 3 in. Circa 1480.

This most beautiful fragment is divided into three compartments by richly sculptured candelabra, which serve as vertical lines of separation. In the centre compartment is a medallion head in profile, in *mezzo rilievo*, evidently a portrait of the person to whose memory the tomb was erected; and, in each of the other compartments, is a device or emblem, consisting of clasped hands issuing from clouds, grouped with a palm and an olive branch, encircled by a label scroll, on which a motto may originally have been painted. The truthful life-like character of the portrait medallion and the exquisite “finesse” of the sculptured devices are not to be surpassed. They stamp this fragment as a work of the highest art of the quattro-cento period. (5899.) Price 33l. 6s.

## No. 10.

SCULPTURED FRIEZE of a chimney-piece, in Florentine stone, attributed to Desiderio di Settignano.—Length, 7 ft. 6 in.

Two flying Amorini, of proportions somewhat less than the life, hold up a wreath which encloses a “stemma,” or shield of arms. The remainder of the surface of the frieze is taken up with two lily branches, with leaves and flowers copied from the natural plants. (5795.) Price 11l. 2s.

## No. 11.

CHIMNEY-PIECE in Macigno or Florentine stone.—Date circa 1490. Height, 8 ft. 6 in.; width, 9 ft. 6 in.

The jambs are filled in with Arabesque ornaments in bas-relief, and are surmounted by acanthus-leaf consoles, which support a deep frieze, decorated in the centre with a “stemma” or shield of arms within an olive wreath, flanked on each side with terminal birds or griffins and rich scroll foliage. The frieze is crowned by a bold enriched cornice. (6738.) Price 16l.

## No. 12.

CHIMNEY-PIECE in Florentine stone.—Width, about 10 ft. 6 in.; entire height, about 13 ft. Circa 1550.

This chimney-piece resembles in style the ornamental architecture of Georgio Vasari, and may possibly have been executed from his designs. The jambs are ornamented with bold consoles and voluted ornaments. The deep frieze is divided into two “fascia,” the lower one as usual containing the family “stemma” within a wreath, and bold foliated scroll work; the upper one with a Latin motto in large incised characters. The cornice is decorated with egg and tongue moulding, dentils, &c., and above it runs a lofty pediment, adorned with cartouche work, &c. (6739.) Price 16l.



## No. 13.

**CIRCULAR RELIEVO.** The arms and devices of a Florentine family surrounded by a massive frame or border in enamelled Terra Cotta, of the "fabrique" of the Della Robbia family, brought from the exterior of the Castle or Villa Pantiatici-Ximenes, near Florence.—Diameter, 11 ft.

This medallion was originally let into the exterior face of a tower or campanile, at a considerable height from the ground; and, although it has been exposed to the action of the atmosphere, probably for a period of 350 years, is almost as perfect as when it first left the ovens of the great Florentine ceramist sculptors. It is enamelled with varied colours, the natural tints of the fruit and foliage of the border being imitated in the most truthful manner. The border affords a perfect example of the favourite Florentine treatment of natural fruit and foliage in architectural decoration. This relieve is one of the largest works of its class ever executed. (6740.) Price 90l.

## No. 14.

**ALTAR-PIECE**, with its lunette complete, in enamelled Terra Cotta of Della Robbia. Brought from a chapel of the family Canigiani, in the Campagna of Florence, near Poggio Imperiale.—Height 8 ft. 6 in.; width 6 ft. 6 in. Circa 1500.

The subject of this altar-piece is the legend of "La Cintola," or the Virgin, after her Assumption, giving her girdle to St. Thomas. In the lunette is a half figure of the Eternal Father. It is most probably a fine work of Andrea della Robbia. (6741.) Price 120l.

## No. 15.

**TABERNACOLO**, or Ciborium, in enamelled Terra Cotta; a work of the Della Robbia family.—Height 4 ft. 3 in.; width 2 ft. Circa 1500.

A complete and beautiful example of decorative enamelled sculpture, of elaborate design; probably the work of Andrea della Robbia. The general effect of the ornamentation in high relief is much enhanced by the most brilliant glaze, and varied enamel colours. (6736.) Price 40l.

## No. 16.

**GROUP** of two Amorini with a Dolphin, in Florentine Terra Cotta. Height, 2 ft. 4 in. Date, first half of the 16th century.

It is difficult to assign this work to any known sculptor. It has, however, a marked Raffaellesque character, and is, in all probability, a work of one of the talented sculptor pupils of the great master. Its original destination was apparently to serve as a fountain jet; although, judging from its excellent state of preservation, it can never have been actually so used. (5891.) Price 10l.



## No. 17.

VIRGIN AND CHILD. Relievo in marble. A votive tablet.—Height 2 ft. 6 in.; width 2 ft. 4 in.; executed in the year 1441.

An interesting and important dated work, in all probability of the school of Arezzo. It is inscribed as follows:—

“Fecerunt fieri Contēs e Tohmas frēs di Spinellis MCCCCXXXI.”  
(5801.) Price 26l.

## No. 18.

CARVED AND GILDED WOOD FRAME OF Shrine, probably the Frontispiece of a Tabernacolo, or Ciborium.—Height, 4 ft. 9 in.; width, 3 ft. Circa 1490.

This extremely elaborate and most beautiful decorative work is, doubtless, by one of the great Florentine sculptors of the end of the 15th century. It offers a remarkable example of sculpture in relief, treated as though seen in perspective. The profusion of embellishment precludes any specific description. All the details are executed with the most delicate finish, whilst, at the same time, they are perfectly subordinated to the masterly architectural *ordonnance* of the design as a whole.  
(5893.) Price 19l.

## No. 19.

STATUE OF VENUS, in *gesso-duro*; the work of Giovanni di Bologna.—Height 3 ft. 6 in.

A beautiful cast or replica of the bronze statue, now in the collection of the Uffizj, in Florence; executed without doubt by the artist himself.  
(5897.) Price 15l.

## Nos. 20, 21, 22.

THREE TRIANGULAR BRACKETS in marble and in Florentine stone.

These brackets, the lower portions of Tabernacoli, or Ciborii, are of different design, and of various degrees of merit. All, however, are of the finest period of Italian art—the 15th century—and are doubtless remains of monuments which formerly adorned the churches of Florence or its neighbourhood. Although it is now impossible to ascribe them to their respective authors, they are unquestionably from the chisels of some of the greatest sculptors of the age. (5796, 5886, 5888.) Price 8l. 13s.

## No. 23.

PANEL of “*Intarsia*,” (inlaid wood-work). A draped female allegorical figure, seated on a throne.—Florentine. 14th century. Height, 2 ft. 9 in.; width, 1 ft. 11 in.

A fine specimen of a very characteristic decorative process. It may very possibly be the work of Andrea Orcagna, and was evidently originally a portion of some important architectural decorative work, perhaps the stalls of a church or the panelling of a conventual library or chapter-house. (5785.) Price 4l.



## No. 24.

CASSONE, or large chest; old Tuscan *Marqueterie* or *Tarsia* work. From a villa or castle of the Rospigliosi family near Pistoja.—Circa 1450. Length, 5 ft. 10 in.; width, 2 ft. 7 in.; height, 3 ft.

The decoration of this very characteristic specimen consists of square sunk panels, filled in with elaborate interlaced designs in tinted woods, surrounded by fascia and other ornamental members, also filled in with scroll-work and a great variety of fret-work patterns, executed as if seen in perspective. On the lid is a "stemma," or shield of arms of the family, surrounded by a wreath tied with long flowing ribbons.

(5924.)

Price 20l.

## No. 25.

CASSONE in carved chestnut wood, purchased in the "Dogana" at Arezzo—Date, circa 1530. Length, 6 ft.; width, 1 ft. 9 in.; height, 1 ft. 11 in.

This beautiful cassone is of rectangular shape, with a flat top, and was evidently intended to be used as a seat as well as a coffer. The front is decorated with a long frieze or panel, exquisitely sculptured with scroll foliage, in the centre of which is a shield of arms within a wreath, flanked by two standing figures of Amorini. The name of the possessor ("*Franciscus M. Piera*") is inscribed in fine Roman characters in small cartouches at each extremity of the frieze. (5898.)

Price 9l. 17s.

## No. 26.

CASSA-BANCA, or large settee (also forming a coffer), in chestnut wood, inlaid with bands of *Tarsia* work.—Florentine. Circa 1550. Length, 8 ft. 2 in.; width, 2 ft. 5 in.; height, 2 ft. 9 in.

Stately pieces of furniture of this model, serving at once as seats and coffers to contain linen and other matters, are still to be found, *in situ*, in a few of the large halls of the ancient Tuscan palaces. Their massive proportions, and architectural design, are in perfect keeping with the grandiose severity of style of the architecture of the country.

(6004.)

Price 14l.

## No. 27.

PAIR OF CASSONE.—Length, 5 ft. 10 in.; width, 2 ft.; height, 2 ft. 2 in. Circa 1540.

These cassone are sarcophagus-shaped, and stand, as usual, on sculptured lions' paws. The decoration is in low relief, and in rather severe geometrical style. The principal feature is a frieze of Palmette ornamentation. Their general aspect, however, is rich and effective, from the profuse manner in which all the mouldings, fascia, &c., are ornamented with fluted sinkings, beads, gadroon work, &c. (6001, 6002.) Price 20l.



## No. 28.

CASSONE.—Length, 5 ft. 5 in.; width, 2 ft.; height, 2 ft. 2 in. Circa 1540.

This beautiful cassone is also sarcophagus-shaped. It is sculptured in high relief, in a very original and effective style. The principal decorative motives consist of bold *Mascheroni*, pendent garlands of fruit and flowers, and rich palmette ornaments; the ground spaces are gilded. Price 20*l*. (5999.)

## No. 29.

CASSONE.—Length, 6ft.; width, 1 ft. 11 in.; height, 2 ft. Circa 1540.

Of rectilinear shape, decorated with panelled work, surrounded by the most elaborately enriched mouldings. The panels are filled in with masterly cartouche work, &c. (6000.) Price 10*l*.

## No. 30.

CASSONE.—Length, 6 ft.; width, 2 ft.; height, 2 ft.

Of similar design to the preceding specimen, but more elaborate and perhaps of rather earlier date.

Cassone, or coffers of the kind now described, were the most striking and important articles of the somewhat scanty furniture of the ancient Italian houses. Their use was apparently common to the entire Peninsula down to the middle of the 16th century, when they seem to have been replaced by cabinets and moveable chairs. They were fabricated by artists of the highest eminence, sculptors, painters, &c., and are of endless variety in design. In the 15th century they were usually gilded and painted with fanciful allegorical subjects, armorial bearings, &c.; but in the 16th century this fashion was succeeded by the richly carved wood specimens.

Vasari has recorded the names of many great artists whose talents were mainly devoted to the production of similar works. They were favourite, if not prescriptive objects of donation at weddings, and are supposed to have been presented to brides to contain their marriage *trousseaux*. Hence they are still commonly known as "marriage chests" ("Cassone di Nozze.") Some of them from their height and general shape can only have served as coffers. Other kinds were evidently intended as seats and are often cushioned at the top. In all times, however, they were probably regarded as prescriptive objects of decorative furniture, intended rather for show than use. (6003.) Price 10*l*.

## Nos. 31, 32.

BOWL, and CRUET, in ancient Florentine porcelain, called *Medici porcelain*.—Date, circa 1600. (5759, 5760.) Price 6*l*.

Until recently it was supposed, that the secret of the composition of porcelain was not discovered in Europe till nearly the end of the 17th century—the earliest authentic record of its production as an article of manufacture being about 1695, at St. Cloud, in France. It was known, nevertheless, that attempts had been made for a long time previously, both



in France and other countries, to produce imitations of the Chinese wares. In the spring of 1859, however, an unexpected discovery at once threw back the epoch of the earliest porcelain manufacture in Europe, for at least a century, and has left no doubt but that to the city of Florence and to the patronage of the celebrated dynasty of the Medici, this, like so many other important advancements of the arts, is really due.

Dr. Foresi, a well known Florentine amateur, had at different times noticed curious specimens of ancient porcelain, decorated in blue, and having singular resemblances in style, on the one hand, to certain Italian majolica wares, and, on the other, to Oriental china. On one or two of them were painters' or manufacturers' marks, which had apparently not been previously noticed. These marks, moreover, were evidently relative to the city of Florence and the Medici dynasty, one being a representation of the cupola of the cathedral, with an F, the other being the well known "palle" or pellets of the Medici arms. On these indications Dr. Foresi set to work to ascertain if any notices could be gathered as to the existence of any previously unknown early Florentine manufactory of porcelain, and his surprise and satisfaction were very great on immediately discovering in a well known Florentine book (the "*Osservatore Fiorentino*") some passages which, by a seemingly inexplicable chance, had been entirely overlooked by all previous writers on the history of pottery. These notices, containing extracts from documents of the period referred to, are to the effect that the Grand Duke Francesco I., celebrated for his love of science, having discovered the secret of the composition of porcelain (aided, as it has since been conjectured, by a certain Bernardo Buontalenti), established a manufactory attached to his famous laboratory in the Boboli Gardens—probably as early as about 1580-90. A description of the marks painted on the pieces are at the same time given by the "*Osservatore*" (a writer of the middle of the last century). This left no doubt as to the identity of Dr. Foresi's specimens with the ware described. On further search other notices were found in different Florentine writers, and finally, a decisive confirmation was obtained by the discovery in the Magliabecchian library of a manuscript book of the epoch, compiled by one of the Duke's scientific *employés*, in which the actual receipts for the composition of the ware were recorded.

It is supposed that the manufacture did not continue long after Duke Francesco's death; this, however, is as yet by no means certain. The specimens now extant at all events are of extreme rarity, about fifteen pieces only being as yet known.

The two specimens now in this Museum were acquired from Dr. Foresi directly after his discovery, and two other specimens have since been brought to this country. The bowl is decorated with conventional foliage, somewhat in the Oriental style, in blue on the white ground, and has the mark of the cupola of the duomo with the letter "F." (for "Florence" or "Francesco") under the foot; the cruet, a double flask for oil and vinegar, is decorated in a similar manner, but is without the mark.

An excellent account of this ware, illustrated by engravings, has recently appeared in the Paris "*Gazette des Beaux Arts*" (No. 5, December 1859), written by M. Albert Jacquemart.



7b

Boy



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